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CIA 104

Ayers, Bradley Earl

SoC 401.2 The WAR THAT
NEVER WAS

CIA 4 Cuba

Inside CIA — human tragedy, months of waiting

THE WAR THAT NEVER WAS, by Bradley Earl Ayers. Bobbs-Merrill. 235 pages, \$8.95.

It was the height of the Kennedy era, with the nation in love with a great President and outraged at the depravity of the Castro regime in Cuba. Refugees struggled ashore in Florida, or were picked up by fishermen and Coast Guard cutters in the straits, sunburned, starved, thirsty, sick and destitute, but now free.

The Bay of Pigs had collapsed in chaos, but still the CIA worked in secret Florida bases training Cuban exiles to sneak back to the island and wreak havoc.

Capt. Bradley Earl Ayers, on loan to "the company" as an instructor in special tactics, happily sweated and strained alongside the decidedly un-military young Cubans recruited off Miami streets. He was proud to be an instrument of a national policy to topple Fidel Castro.

Ayers himself admits to two forays into Cuba with the commandos, neither trip particularly successful at bringing Fidel to his knees.

PUZZLED BY the civilian bureaucracy of the CIA ("... then, at five o'clock each day, they just stopped the war..."), frustrated by the resistance to discipline and military order among the commandos, and finally tortured by the disintegration of his own marriage because his military wife wouldn't understand the secrecy, Ayers lived an exciting life in those years, and tells of them with hair-raising literary success.



Fidel Castro

His final assignment, in 1963, was to train a team of raiders to sneak onto Cuban shores and destroy an oil refinery. The raid would include all the finest tactics of guerrilla warfare — diversion, cold-blooded murder, rockets and mortars, underwater demolition, and finally escape to an awaiting trawler in international waters. For practice, the team "attacked" a Bell System microwave station on the Florida coast.

BUT ON NOV. 22, 1963, it all came crash-

ing down. As the echoes of the Dallas rifleman's horrors spread worldwide, the CIA halted the covert training temporarily, until Lyndon Johnson's policies could be sorted out, and then permanently put them on ice.

Vietnam was to be the great battle against the Communists, not Cuba.

Ayers didn't like that, sulked and brooded for months while awaiting something to do, and finally quit both the CIA and the Army. After his resignation he tried to work with militant and independent anti-Castro groups, but found them disorganized, poorly-led and hopelessly competitive with one another for every skirmish against Castro.

EMBITTERED BY THE U.S.'s turn to Southeast Asia and abandonment of the Cubans, Ayers writes, "This was no case of intervention by a foreign power. No effort had been made by the United States to impose its form of government on Cuba. The exiles were Cuban citizens and had every right to return to their native soil..." And if they chose to return with satchel charges and grease guns, it was their prerogative.

The CIA's need-to-know secrecy kept Ayers from any definite knowledge of a CIA plot to assassinate Fidel Castro, though he heard rumors. Now that investigations are beginning into possible connections between that plot and JFK's death, it could develop that Ayers was simply a pawn in a colossal game of King of the Mountain, a game which the other side won. — Reviewed by Charles Stough, *Daily News* copy editor.